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Breaking Silences and Revealing Ghosts: Spectral Moments of Gendered Violence in Mexico

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Amanda L. Petersen

Abstract: This paper examines recent discourse around gender violence in social media protests in Mexico and a short story collection that anthologizes representations of gender violence in short stories by Mexican women authors as part of a greater genre of anti-feminicide cultural production. I focus my analysis on the hashtag campaigns #MiPrimerAcoso and #SiMeMatan and the *microcuento* collection *¡Basta! 100 mujeres en contra la violencia de género* (Edición mexicana 2014) as ghostly discourses that create a space for breaking the silence of sexual and gendered violence. In these hashtags and micro short stories, I find spectral moments that allow for one to read the stories of gender violence that have been silenced through the discounting of women's voices and of the recounting of violence against perpetrated against them. The ghostly discourse reveals many representations of gendered violence that resist patriarchal and stereotypical depictions and the haunting presence of those who have gone missing or been murdered for those who remain. These texts uncover the institutional and societal refusal to recognize victims as well as the impunity surrounding gender violence and feminicide. My analysis reveals how the effects of violence are depicted on female bodies in texts that are especially provocative from the perspective of ghostly discourse of gendered violence.

Keywords: Ghostly discourse, gendered violence, silencing of women, anti-feminicide cultural production, spectrality

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Amanda L. Petersen

(University of San Diego)

Silencing, or refusing to hear, breaks this social contract of recognizing another's humanity and our connectedness.

Solnit (2017)

Introduction

Created in response to mass manifestations protesting *machista* violence in large urban centers on April 24, 2016 and the accompanying #MiPrimerAcoso hashtag movement in Mexico,[1] Mexico City-based *Nexos* magazine published a special issue in June 2016 titled *Violencias invisibles* with an introduction and six articles on the current state of violence against women in Mexico. The issue's introduction asserts that the level of societal complicity involved in making gender violence invisible – in hiding and tolerating it – is astounding. The editors observe that all societal spheres ("la familia, las escuelas, las empresas, los medios […] el Estado mismo") are guilty of silencing and making invisible the experiences of gender violence (Redacción Nexos: 2016). The accompanying contributions situate the sociological reasons why the realities of gendered violence remain hidden and ignored, the ways in which it is diminished and silenced in Mexican society, and the evidence in the form of statistics and legislative realities. The most impactful observation for this article on the ghostly discourse of gender violence is how it is silenced and disregarded despite evidence that this violence, in all of its various manifestations, pervades all spaces of Mexican society – from the most public to the most private spaces. The introduction to the issue ends with a key question: "¿Estamos listos para escuchar a las mujeres?" (Redacción Nexos: 2016). The answer, perhaps, is not yet.

The Silencing of Gender Violence

My analysis in this article centers around the ghostly discourses surrounding gender violence in recent hashtag movements and short fiction that collectively break the imposed silence surrounding gender violence. These hashtag campaigns protesting gender violence (in particular #MiPrimerAcoso and #SiMeMatan) and the *microcuentos* found in the anthology

[1] #PrimeiroAsedio started in Brasil in 2015; see Ruiz-Navarro (2016) for more context.

¡Basta! Cien mujeres en contra la violencia de género (2014)[2] are part of a greater category of anti-feminicide cultural production, which is Zavala's term to denote works that revolve around the theme of denouncing or raising awareness about feminicide in Mexico ("producción antifeminicidista mexicana"; Zavala 2016: 57). The concept *feminicidio* was first defined by Radford and Russell and subsequently applied to the Mexican context by many scholars, such as Lagarde and Monárrez Fragoso.[3] The term recognizes that the murder of women does not occur in isolation, requests that society recognizes the violence that men perpetrate against women, and urges us to "address the various structural dimensions of violence that makes the exploitation and murder of women possible" (Monárrez Fragoso 2018: 913). As such, feminicide invites us to look at crimes committed on female bodies as a reflection of societal breakdown that reveals systemic and institutional violences that enable multiple forms of gender violence, from discrimination, to assault, to unsafe streets, to the literal murder of women because they are women. Monárrez Fragoso posits that the term provides us with the means to "understand *why* some women are turned into murderable and disposable subjects so that their deaths, following Giorgio Agamben, have no legal consequences for the perpetrators" (Fragoso 2018: 913). It is for this reason that Monárrez prefers to discuss "systemic sexual feminicides" in order to recognize the greater societal causes that allow the murder of women and, especially, marginalized women (Monárrez Fragoso 2017b).

Despite the fact that concept of feminicide obliges us to look at the murder of women as one aspect of a larger systematic phenomenon of gender violence that occurs throughout Mexico, the focus of much anti-feminicide cultural production is centered not only on representing primarily the murder of women but also geographically isolates the phenomenon to the border region. Meredith and Rodríguez Cortés observe that few works that seek to "influence the public court of opinion" and express outrage towards gender violence expand the narrow geographic focus beyond the border regions or on greater, systemic, causes of gender violence (Meredith / Rodríguez Cortés 2017: 239).[4] Both Zavala and Meredith and Rodríguez Cortés in their work

[2] Another anthology that is not discussed in this article due to space limitations that treats gender violence and feminicide is *El Silencio de los cuerpos: Relatos sobre feminicidios*, edited by Sergio González Rodríguez and published in 2015.

[3] Both Lagarde (2006) and Monárrez (2018; 2017a; 2017b) use Radford and Russell's *Femicide* (1992) as a starting point for their work on the concept of feminicide in the Mexican context. Radford and Russell argue that feminicide is not simply homicide with a female victim but rather part of the greater category of gender violence, see Radford / Russell (1992). Fregoso and Bejarano's *Terrorizing Women* focuses on feminicide in the Americas, see Fregoso / Bejarano (2010).

[4] Meredith and Rodríguez Cortés examine a diverse array of works, from plays, to films, to art installations in their article. Their focus also includes the greater phenomenon of violence against women across the country, see Meredith /Rodríguez Cortés (2017). Finnegan's monograph, which was published after the acceptance of this

on anti-feminicide cultural production note the pitfalls of attempting to represent gender violence.[5] Many fall to the temptation to either glorify violence against women, especially in popular culture such as in music videos,[6] or to provide resolutions that are too readily tidied that falsely comfort the audience, as seen in journalistic discourse[7] and many cultural productions such as film and narrative.[8] The cultural productions that I engage in this article participate in the greater category of anti-feminicide cultural production but resist in important ways the reifying of stereotypes and misconceptions regarding the phenomenon.

My discussion centers around how discourse and representations of gender violence appear as ghostly because they have been silenced or suppressed. These works do not discuss literal specters but rather implement the ghostly as a means to bring to the fore that which is silenced and unspoken, unarticulated and absent.[9] For Solnit, the discursive violence of silencing women's voices (through impunity and normalization) highlights the ghostly nature of these stories.[10] In Gordon's sense, the spectral obliges us to look for the silenced, invisible or absent and for that which has been excluded from hegemonic discourse; discourse that excludes the stories of injustice, "loss and absence in historical trauma" (Gordon in Ribas-Casasayas / Petersen 2016: 3). In *Espectros*, Ribas-Casasayas and I argue that the spectral "is an aesthetic that seeks ways to counteract erasure, silencing, and forgetting that eschews melancholic attachment to loss. It seeks to construct itself" (Ribas Casasazas / Petersen 2016: 3). I refer to the gendered specter because gender markers of those who haunt and those who are haunted matter, as Blanco and Peeren remind us in their seminal work on spectrality studies.[11] They describe that the gendered specter can be a "conceptual metaphor to effect revisions of history and/or reimaginations of the future in order to expose and address the way certain subjectivities can never be erased" (Blanco / Peeren 2013: 309).[12] In the current Mexican context, to bring

article, is a comprehensive look at the ethics of representation of feminicide and gender violence along the border in film, literature, and art, see Finnegan (2019).

[5] See Zavala (2016) and Meredith / Rodríguez Cortés (2017).

[6] See Meredith / Rodríguez Cortés (2017).

[7] Corona's work focuses on mediatic discourse on femicide in newspapers, see Corona (2010).

[8] Tabuenca Córdoba examines a large body of filmic works that represent Ciudad Juárez and feminicide, see Tabuenca Córdoba (2010). Zavala analyses authorship and representation in films (such as *El traspatio* (2009)), journalist authored works (such as Charles Bowden's *La ciudad del crimen* (2010), and more critical takes on feminicide (such as Sergio González Rodríguez's *The Femicide Machine* (2012)), see Zavala (2016).

[9] Martínez's discussion of the ghostly is essential here. She states that "[t]he language of the specter is […] justified not by the presence of ghosts in these works, but by the use of the ghostly as a means to unpack the complex relation between representational practices, historical violence, and ethical concerns. These works do not speak of ghosts. However, in the disruptive force of spectrality they all find a way to explore the unresolved absences and truncated histories that haunt them" (Martínez manuscript under review: 4).

[10] See Solnit (2017).

[11] See Blanco / Peeren (2013: 310).

[12] Blanco and Peeren use Bal's notion of a conceptual metaphor, as one that goes beyond literary or aesthetic comparison and "performs theoretical work" (Bal in Blanco / Peeren 2013: 1).

the fore gender violence in hashtag campaigns and short fictions, is to implement a spectral aesthetic that forces us to attend to spectral and ghostly silences. The cultural silencing of the stories of gender violence fails to fully erase these narratives and, paradoxically, the remainders created in their suppression generate a spectral repetition of the affective impact of gender violence that manifests as spectral moments.

The hashtag movements and recently-published micro-short fiction that this article examines break the silence surrounding gender violence and reveal ghostly discourses and spectral moments. These stories do not limit their focus to solely Juárez or even the act of murdering women but rather on the broader notion of *feminicidio* as an extreme result of a society that creates multi-faceted conditions that enable and encourage gender violence. Their brief forms – Twitter or Facebook posts and extremely brief micro-short stories – are direct and concise means of breaking silences that stand in stark contrast to sign heavy representations in traditional Mexican media.[13] Additionally, it is noteworthy that these texts tell ghostly stories in a manner that puts the discourses in dialogue with one another and thus shifts the dynamic from single authorship and authority to one of collaboration and collective conversation. Rivera Garza in her *Dolerse: Textos desde un país herido* calls for a shift from single authorship towards collective voices in writing as a powerful means to recognize pain on the collective social body and resist the overwhelming nature of the violence in Mexico that has now lasted twelve years.[14] The discourse I examine attempts to counter dominant, unquestioned narratives surrounding gender violence, such as patriarchal victim blaming or erasure of the victim through otherization.[15] These stories also resist the temptation to neatly resolve the narratives or geographically isolate them to the border.

Spectral Moments of Hashtag Movements – #MiPrimerAcoso, #SiMeMatan

When #MeToo went viral in fall 2017 in the wake of a *New York Times* exposé on Harvey Weinstein, much of the world perceived that the #MeToo hashtag movement was a watershed moment for awareness around sexual aggression.[16] What fewer people know is that, in Mexico

[13] Analysis of the choice of genre (*microcuentos* and hashtags campaigns) in contrast to traditional Mexican media warrants attention in the future. In addition to their brevity and directness, the ephemeral nature of social media discourse could also be read as spectral. Future iterations of this research will investigate this more profoundly.
[14] See Rivera Garza (2011). The year 2006, which coincides with President Felipe Calderon's declaration of War on Drugs, is generally used to mark a resurgence of violence.
[15] Monárrez Fragoso, in her "Amnesia nacional de las víctimas de tortura", gives detailed sociological analysis and theory for the erasure of victims of violence and the politics of silence in the public and private sectors in regard to victims of governmental and "drug war" torture, see Monárrez Fragoso (2017a).
[16] Note that the non-Twitter version of the "Me Too" gesture was created by the activist Tarana Burke in 2007, ten years before it went viral internationally via Twitter, see García (2017). Mexican feminists, such as Lamas have

and in Latin America, activists have been fighting to raise awareness for years with various viral hashtag movements such as #NiUnaMenos and its various iterations, like #NiUnaMás, and #VivasLasQueremos, among many others.[17] The spring of 2016, however, was particularly impactful; it became known as the "purple spring" in Latin America, full of well publicized massive protests accompanied by an explosion of hashtag movements that create spectral moments as they break the silence of gender violence throughout Mexico (and Latin America).[18]

Ribas-Casasayas and I describe examples of spectral moments, such as gestures that recognize that which has violently been made to disappear, intergenerational confrontations of lost histories to question the previously unexamined, or the erasure of disadvantaged groups by being made other.[19] We frame otherization in terms of Enrique Dussel's notions of modernity as a system that creates advantages for the European world and disadvantages other groups.[20] In Dussel's view, all disadvantaged groups become "other" and "all opposition, resignation, or lack of participation in the modern world is seen as a substantial flaw in the other" (Dussel in Ribas-Casasayas / Petersen 2016: 6). Through this othering, modern systems and institutions reject any responsibility for the disappearance (literal or metaphorical) of the other. Therefore, we argue that a spectral moment occurs when "forced institutional erasures" are revealed (Ribas-Casasayas / Petersen 2016: 6). Spectral moments do not depict literal ghosts but rather reveal a spectral aesthetic, or a sort of "literary grammar", to use Martínez's term,[21] that allows for silences to be broken and absences to be read or recognized.

A typical #MiPrimerAcoso tweet narrates an account of being verbally assaulted or ogled in public at a young age or being touched inappropriately by a family member, classmate, or family friend. The campaign was started by the activist group (e)sterotipas on April 23, 2016 preceding the "primavera violeta" protests planned the next day.[22] Lewis exposes the affective weight of the discourse of the #MiPrimerAcoso hashtag, in that it provides a space for an

criticized the US-based #MeToo movement for not focusing on more acute violences against women, such as feminicide, see Lamas (2018).

[17] Although these gender-based viral hashtag campaigns follow the model of previous hashtag movements that began many years before 2016, see Rabasa (2017), #NiUnaMenos became a viral hashtag campaign originating in Argentina in 2016, see Redacción BBC Mundo (2016).

[18] For nuanced and critical discussions on the discourse surrounding the #MeToo movement in the Mexican and Latin American contexts from leading Mexican feminists, see Lamas (2018) and Ferreyra (2018). Ferreyra, in particular, distinguishes the discursive differences between #NiUnaMenos (resistance) and #MeToo (solidarity). See Petersen (2016) for an early articulation of these arguments on breaking the silence of gender violence in Mexico.

[19] See Ribas-Casasayas / Petersen (2016: 4-6).

[20] See Ribas-Casasayas / Petersen (2016: 6).

[21] Martínez argues for the notion of spectral realism that breaks from fantastic or magical depiction of the specter but rather speaks to an aesthetic or a "literary grammar" of the spectral (Martínez manuscript under review).

[22] A similar campaign was organized in Brazil in 2013; see Ruiz (2016) for more information on the inception of the movement in Mexico.

individual to deeply identify personally with the movement, either by sharing personal stories or by retweeting others and "'re-telling' of scene of violence" (Lewis 2018: 425). These are spectral moments that break taboos about speaking of children being victims of sexual assault and moments that publicly name experiences as sexual violence, possibly for the first time for many. Often these are circumstances that victims were too young to have the vocabulary to label as violence at the time of their occurrences. Author and scholar González Mateos' Facebook post about boys simulating rape at her elementary school by thrusting towards a triangle on the blackboard is an example of these spectral moments of recognition of violence, even when such recognition was impossible in the moment it occurred.

> #MiPrimerAcoso Estaba en sexto año de primaria. Ese día, a la hora del recreo, se me ocurrió ir a sacar algo de mi mochila. Los niños se habían apoderado del salón. Habían pintado un triángulo con el vértice hacia abajo en el pizarrón. Una línea iba del vértice hacia el centro del triángulo. Confusamente entendí que era el dibujo de una vulva. Por turnos, entre gritos de todos los que festejaban, brincaban para pegar los genitales al triángulo, que se iba borrando poco a poco. Faltaban años para que las palabras "violación" o "acoso sexual" entraran a mi vocabulario. No hubiera podido explicar por qué me dio tanto miedo, una gran repulsión. Sólo entendí que no debía entrar.

As observed in González Mateos' #MiPrimerAcoso entry, these are acts that recognize the symbolic violence that has been historically dismissed or silenced by shame or taboo; violence that contributes to a society and institutions that make feminicide possible. Yet, as anyone who dares to read the comment section on news stories on gender violence and feminicide knows, patriarchal, victim-blaming discourse seems to persist in public discourse on feminicide and gender violence.[23]

The year 2017 was a pivotal moment for anti-feminicide discourse in social media, in part because of two very high profile cases of feminicide that inspired the #SiMeMatan campaign and invoked public outrage towards the typical discourse of discounting and diminishing of the "worthiness" of victims.[24] The first was Lesvy Berlín Osorio who was found strangled on the

[23] Spectral moments of hashtag campaigns are not limited to gender-centered movements. One of the first movements named for a hashtag in Mexico, #YoSoy132 in 2012 was created to resist the discounting of anti-Enrique Peña Nieto as presidential candidate protestors, see Rabasa (2017). The gesture of the #YoSoy132 hashtag movement is a performative act that resists attempts at institutional erasure and demands that their voices be heard and not dismissed. In my reading, #YoSoy132 is a spectral moment in that the discourse from the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) coalition attempted to dismiss the voices and voting power of the student protestors by othering them as a competitor's campaign staff. In 2014, with disappearance and suspected murder of the 43 students from Ayotzinapa Rural Teachers' College in Guerrero by narcos hired by the state, there were several hashtag movements, such as #YoSoy43, that were accompanied by massive protests that denied the PRI government's attempts to discount the importance of the students' lives.

[24] At the moment of writing this article, in summer 2018, the *Violencias invisible*s issue seems extraordinarily prescient given that no one could have anticipated that 2016 would have been a precursor for the explosion of discussion of gender violence and harassment in global popular discourse in 2017. It feels imperative to at least nod to the urgency of the discussion of gender violence in today's global climate with the Latin America-based

Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México's campus in May 2017. In response to demands for investigations into her death, the Procuraduría CDMX made public comments about Berlín Osorio no longer being a university student and her positive toxicology reports in a way that implied that her death was justified. In fact, their first hypothesis about her death was that she committed suicide by strangling herself in front of her boyfriend before their stance changed and they charged him with intentional homicide and finally aggravated feminicide. In short, the authorities made her other – eliminating her as "worthy" victim – and blame her, quite literally, for her own death.[25] The viral outrage of the #SiMeMatan campaign became a for women to collectively and discursively place themselves in the symbolic space of the victim-made-other and reject her otherization.[26] Typical tweets from #SiMeMatan give reasons for why the speaker's murder would be discounted or blamed on her.[27] For instance, many participants mention their unconventional life choices, their clothing choices, their tattoos, their independence, or their non-conformity with societal restrictions. These tweets discursively place the speaker into the position of murdered other and dares her audience to discount her as an unworthy victim or of one deserving of feminicide.

One of the most spectral moments of the #SiMeMatan movement occurred when it was reported that Mara Castilla, who was killed in September 2017 in Puebla state, had participated in the campaign, tweeting four months earlier that "#SiMeMatan será porque me gustaba salir de noche y tomar mucha cerveza..." (Castilla in Cruz 2017). Within a week of Castilla's disappearance, Puebla police localized her strangled body and arrested the Cabify driver who had picked her up at 5am from an area where many young people are known to go clubbing in Cholula. Her case caused widespread outrage for many reasons, one of them was that the rector

movements against gender violence and feminicide and the global #MeToo movements. It is inherently complicated to intervene in the discussions taking place today in Mexico, Latin America and the US and many activists, scholars, and readers have personal and professional stakes in them. To mention a few of the discussions taking place at the time of writing in summer 2018, I mention abortion rights in Argentina and asylum cases in the US for women fleeing domestic violence in Central America. Argentina narrowly lost a valiant fight to pass an abortion rights bill in August 2018. In the same month in the US, a judge ordered the return of a deported woman and her daughter from Central America because she had requested asylum due to domestic violence. This judgement defied US Attorney General Jeff Session's previous declaration that asylum would no longer be granted for cases of domestic violence.

[25] A month after Berlín Osorio's death, her death was ruled a suicide but her boyfriend was taken into custody for "homocidio simple doloso por omisión". Months later, El Tribunal Superior de Justicia of the capital ordered that the case be reclassified as aggravated feminicide. See Redacción Silla Rota (2017) and Redacción Animal Político (2018).

[26] Although it is beyond the scope of this article, there have been parallel moments of highlighting violences against transwomxn that have been resisting otherization and victim blaming in noteworthy ways, such as #Transfeminicidio, #Transfobio, #DuelesMéxico, #TransFeminicdioAlerta, #ResistenciaTrans. These are generally co-tagged with well-established campaigns against the murder of women, like #NiUnaMenos, #NiUnaMás.

[27] A group on the UNAM campus maintains a Twitter account with the handle @SiMeMatan, curating the movement and retweeting #SiMeMatan tweets from outside of the university community.

of a neighboring university claimed that women out at that hour were not behaving properly – again, making Castilla other and blaming her. In subsequent weeks, it was revealed that before Castilla's death Puebla state refused to enact the "alerta de género" because the authorities were concerned that it would scare away tourists. At the time of Castilla's murder, the #YoSoyMara campaign began to trend, which in turn led to #TodasSomosMara, #TodasSomosLesvy, among others.[28] The narrative and symbolic gestures of the creation of the #SiMeMatan movement are impactful spectral moments. I perceive that these hashtag campaigns open a space to defy the cultural scripts[29] of victim blaming through collective narratives formed 140 / 280 characters at a time. They also provide a space for narrating direct resistance to patriarchal discourse that makes victims other, blaming her and diminishing the need for justice for their deaths.

As established in the previous section, all forms of gender violence, including feminicide have been diminished and discounted in mediatic, popular, and institutional discourse in Mexico.[30] In her studies on feminicide, Monárrez Fragoso has done extensive research on what she calls systemic sexual feminicides and how victims are intersectionally marginalized and made into victims deserving of violence or unworthy of justice.[31] The principal methods of othering the victims (in Dussel's sense) are discounting them because of skin color or race, of how they were found dressed, of the space where the bodies were found, or of being outsiders.[32] Monárrez, citing Bhabha's ideas about calls for justice, interprets hashtag campaigns such as #NiUnaMenos or #NiUnaMas as an attempt to give space to suffering via language and as an appeal for justice that will go forth into the future.[33] This is akin to what Derrida might call the specter's inherent demand for justice into the future.[34]

The hashtag campaigns that mobilized around both Berlín Osorio and Castilla's feminicides and, sadly, the murder of many other women whose deaths have been both noticed and unnoticed, are spectral moments that brings to the forefront discourse that seeks to denounce and resist the gender violence of feminicide for all victims. The fact that Berlín Osorio and

[28] See Signa_Lab ITESO (2017) for graphs on trending hashtags in the weeks after Castilla's murder. Among the most frequent were #JusticiaParaMara, #NoFueTuCulpa, #AlertaMujeresMx, among the expected #NiUnaMenos and #NiUnaMás. In their Twitter link to this article, @Signa_Lab posted "#MaraCastilla: Una herida abierta en un país que acumula tragedias pero también capacidades críticas de movilización" (2017).
[29] Haaken develops the notion of cultural scripts of gender / domestic violence in her work on the power of storytelling to change dominant discourse in the United States, see Haaken (2010).
[30] In the first weeks of August 2018, there was another resurgence of #SiMeMatan and related hashtags with news of María Trinidad Matus's death while backpacking in Costa Rica and the victim blaming discourse of how dangerous it is for a young woman to travel alone.
[31] See Monárrez Fragoso (2018; 2017b)
[32] See Monárrez Fragoso (2017b).
[33] See Monárrez Fragoso (2018: 918).
[34] See Derrida (1994: xix)

Castilla's murders have an accused perpetrator in police custody only further reiterates the invisbility and impunity for over a thousand estimated feminicides in 2017 throughout Mexico.[35] Many are less privileged, 'mournable', and visible victims than these high-profile cases, which emphasizes the necessity to insist on denouncing violences against women collectively in a way that could possibly lead to increased awareness, more empathy, and less victim blaming, even as Mexico is currently experiencing a resurgence in violence. One example of these spectral efforts is #NoEstamosTodas, a Facebook page and Twitter hashtag that seeks to make feminicides and transfeminicides literally more visible by posting an artistic illustration for each womxn reported murdered in Mexico this year.

Enough! The Fantasmata of Microcuentos

The Mexican edition of *¡Basta! Cien mujeres en contra la violencia de género*, published in 2014, is a collection of microcuentos[36] that follows the model of previous editions that began in Chile in 2011[37] with an open call for micro-narratives that speak to the topic of gender violence and intend to raise awareness about it and denounce its multiple forms. The authors, generally, either novice or lesser-known authors working in a variety of professions, seek to resist dominant narratives of many types of gender violence, from symbolic and discursive, to physical and fatal violence in each of their micro-short stories. In creating alternate narratives and a plurality of voices that unite collectively, along the lines proposed by Rivera Garza in *Dolerse* (2011), these authors collectively tell ghostly stories that break silence and resist dominant patriarchal discourses of victim blaming and otherization of victims.[38] In fact, one of the microcuentos directly references the collective nature of narrating pain on the female social body; in "Queridita mía" by Cerón, the narrative voice declares "[h]oy no podemos porque estamos rotas pero pronto estaremos de pie. Otra vez. Juntas." (Cerón 2014: 21). Muñiz, in her prologue, observes that "la ficción no solo propicia su palabra silenciada, también les ofrece mundos posibles y les permite deconstruir a la víctima que las encarna" (Muñiz 2014: 9).

[35] See https://feminicidiosmx.crowdmap.com for ongoing data on the statistics on the murder of women in the country; though its numeric precision is difficult to ascertain, it clearly points to the problem's gravity and widespread nature.

[36] I use the title of this collection to refer to the genre of short stories in this collection. For in-depth discussion of generic terms such as microcuentos, minicuentos, or flash fiction, see Lauro Zavala's *La minificción bajo el microscopio* (2005).

[37] Other *¡Basta!* series have been published in Argentina, Peru, Venezuela, Bolivia, and Colombia since the original edition in Chile.

[38] As mentioned previously, another anthology that treats gender violence and feminicide is *El Silencio de los cuerpos: Relatos sobre feminicidios* (González Rodríguez 2015). Estrada's article on *El Silencio* recognizes the collective nature of the anthology and how it participates in Garza's call for collective recognition of pain and mourning, see Estrada (2018).

Additionally, these microcuentos, perhaps precisely because of their abbreviated narrative form, resist the temptation to have wrapped up endings, as Zavala and Tabuenca Córdoba observe as a pitfall of many anti-feminicide cultural productions.[39] They are brief flashes of silenced stories – from stories that might be discounted as violence, to racialized accounts of feminicide, to women who kill their perpetrators.

Although the majority of the texts focus on more overt sexual violence, the anthology begins with two microcuentos that set the stage for naming less patent and visible mistreatment as gender violence. Gordon notes that we are sometimes haunted by even that which we cannot name in "complex personhood" (Gordon 2008: 5). The symbolic act in *¡Basta!* of recognizing gender violence that is ignored in mainstream media and public discourse is akin to the spectral moment of identifying sexual violence that had previously been unnamed and unrecognized in #MiPrimerAcoso. The first microcuento by Estrada Torres gives a flash narrative of a woman who works harder and more consistently than her male counterpart but is treated unequally.[40] The second by Lucero Hernández, "Carne de edecán", reveals the humiliation and objectification of a protagonist working as an 'edecán' for an auto shop.[41] The selection and placement of these microcuentos narrating violences that are most certainly invisible in mainstream public discourse is an important gesture to demand recognition for many types of violence beyond the often over-sensationalized depictions of feminicide in the media. These and several other microcuentos throughout the anthology help expand limited definitions of gender violence and look towards their greater collective impact. Muñiz reminds the reader in her prologue that "[l]a violencia no es un evento íntimo ni restringido a la relación entre un hombre y una mujer, la violencia tiene implicaciones biopolíticas sobre el cuerpo colectivo de las mujeres" (Muñiz 2014: 11).

Unlike less overt versions of gender violence, feminicide against the female social body is often depicted and sensationalized in the news media, in particular through the use of images. Corona examines these depictions, primarily in newspapers, and the emotional reactions that the images displayed evoke.[42] The affective weight of the images "creates a collective psychosis by alarming the citizenry while offering few alternatives for coping with imminent danger" (Corona 2010: 110). Because the audience seeks to both be alarmed and comforted, combined

[39] See Zavala (2016) and Tabuenca Córdoba (2010).
[40] See Estrada Torres (2014: 15).
[41] See Lucero Hernández (2014: 16). In Mexico, 'edecanes' are attractive women, usually relatively provocatively dressed, who interface with the public in an attempt to draw them into businesses or political events. In 2018, Mexico City's government announced that it would no longer utilize "edecanes" in an attempt to empower women and not reinforce negative gender stereotypes about them.
[42] See Corona (2010).

with endless rapid fire news cycles, media producers attempt to neatly conclude the stories, and the effect is often the attempt to explain or justify the victimization of the murdered women in a way that reproduces patriarchal and otherizing discourse, creating a "syntax of blame and guilt" that rhetorically makes social violence invisible (Corona 2010: 116). Tabuenca Córdoba observes that a similar syntax makes it easier for a viewer (of films in her study) to distance themselves from the victim, further discounting the violence, while othering and dehumanizing the victim and seeking false comfort in a false sense of distance.[43] These media depictions of feminicide create mental images of victims who are guilty of creating circumstances that make them victims. In both Dussel and Monárrez Fragoso's sense, they are othered and found at fault for the crimes committed against them and the impunity surrounding the crimes is justified.[44]

The way that the 'notas rojas' – with their sensationalistic headlines and bloody photographs "presented as public spectacle" (Corona / Domínguez-Ruvalcaba 2010: 6) – create mental images about stories of gender violence is notorious and some anti-feminicide cultural productions have explicitly resisted these tendencies.[45] Zavala astutely notes how González Rodríguez's *The Femicide Machine* resists the photographic sensationalism of the 'nota roja' or 'amarillismo' by excluding photographs even as González Rodríguez explicitly references them in his "Instructions for Taking Textual Photographs" (2012).[46] In this chapter, González Rodríguez briefly recounts the life of one victim of feminicide, Lilia Alejandra García Andrade, accompanied by textual descriptions of numbered photographs of her life and the site of her murder.[47] Many of the descriptions function as flash narratives, as textual snapshots of an instant of the victim's life that reveal humanizing details that are frequently absent from 'nota rojas' or 'amarillismo'. Zavala observes that "la ausencia de retratos se manifiesta como un microcosmos del estatus dual de los feminicidios de existir / no existir: se efectúa una eliminación ontológica de los crímenes al borrar cualquier huella de ellos" (Zavala 2016: 64). In a parallel way that Zavala notes that González Rodríguez' microcosmos without images eliminates the binary between a crime existing or not, the author's work also removes the "syntax of blame and guilt" (Corona 2010: 116) that leads to the discounting of victims of gender violence and erases the binary between worthy or unworthy victim.

[43] See Tabuenca Córdoba (2010).
[44] As discussed in previous section, see Dussel as interpreted in Ribas-Casasayas / Petersen (2016) on the otherization of the marginalized and Monárrez Fragoso (2018) on the marginalization of victims of feminicide.
[45] Driver argues that "violent, graphic descriptions and images of feminicide […] contribute to the exploitation and objectification of the female body" (2015: 73). She uses the notion of the ghostly female body as a body that is unworthy of justice.
[46] See Zavala (2016).
[47] See González Rodríguez (2012).

The narrative snapshots created in the 'microcuentos' from *¡Basta!* eliminate the temptation to neatly conclude stories of violence while uncovering multiple layers of forms of gender violence, humanizing the victims, and resisting revictimizing victim-blaming discourse seen in popular and mediatic discourse to create alternate mental images of the stories of gender violence. Mitchell theorizes on images, from graphic to verbal, in his "What is an Image" (1984). For Mitchell, mental images can be dreams, memories, ideas, or fantasmatas. Fantasmatas are "revived versions of those impressions called up by the imagination in the absence of the objects that originally stimulated them" (Mitchell 1984: 505). Collectively, I perceive that the microcuentos of *¡Basta!* create fantasmatas of the silenced stories of gender violence that attempt to shift the stereotypical mental images of gender violence that deny a victim's ability to seek justice. These flash fictions resist the well-worn mental image of gender violence to shift the mental images, the cultural scripts[48] of gender violence.

Gordon has made evident the difficulty of seeking justice for the disappeared and the complication of the lack of closure from a death that is not resolved,[49] which has been the case with the disappearance of women that are eventually named feminicides.[50] She reminds us of how "[d]eath exists in the past tense, disappearance in the present" (Gordon 2008: 113). Gordon describes the work of examining the ghostly as "[f]inding the shape described by her absence, [which] captures the paradox of tracking through time and across all those forces that which makes its mark by being there and not at the same time" (Gordon 2006: 6). Several of these microcuentos aim to reveal the shape of the absences of the protagonists by using an object to define the absence and point towards a possible specter of justice into the future. For instance, "Las manecillas de la muñeca" by VillaLoredo, a one sentence microcuento, utilizes a play on words (the hands on the clock of a wrist watch) to mark the hour of the victim's death: "La muñeca envuelta en plástico negro estaba ahí bajo la tierra con un reloj que marcaba la hora. Ella sabía la hora de su muerte" (VillaLoredo 2014: 90). The buried wrist(watch) gives testimony to her absence and silence. In "Modelo" by Morales Gasca, the protagonist is enamored by her photographer boyfriend by modeling for him but, when she decides she no longer wants to be his model after months of being abused, there is one last photo taken of her. The textual image at the end is of "[l]a fotografía [que] reveló a un corazón marchito que alojaba una bala" (Morales Gasca 2014: 52). The bullet gives testimony to her forever silenced desire to leave her abusive boyfriend. These narrative images of the photograph and the wrist(watch)

[48] As mentioned previously, see Haaken (2010) for more on the narrative power of shifting cultural scripts of domestic violence in the US.
[49] See Gordon (2008: 111-113).
[50] Driver engages with ghostly aspects of the disappeared and notes that they "have a real influence on how citizens experience and access basic human rights" (2015: 66).

in these two microcuentos are spectral remnants that call for these experiences to not be kept in invisibility and impunity.

Other microcuentos employ the voice of the disappeared or dead to create fantasmata. Gordon informs us that the "[g]host registers and incites, and that is why we have to talk about it graciously, why we have to learn how it speaks, why we have to grasp the fullness of its life world, its desires and its standpoint" (Gordon 2008: 207). Nozal's contribution, "Ciudad Juárez", has a first-person narrative voice that speaks in the present of a future interrupted: "No tuve hijos. Sólo esta memoria que no alcanza a contar heridas ni madrugadas" (Nozal 2014: 38). In "Desamparo", Franco Chávez's text is a two-sentence third-person narrative that tells of a mother who protests and fights against impunity for her daughter's murder publicly but the mother is silenced with her murder on the steps of the Palacio de Gobierno (Franco Chávez 2014: 28).[51] Finally, Rosas Pineda's "Desde aquel día", is from the point of view of a named voice, Sara, who sees her own lifeless and violented body from a space where she has finally escaped her pain and from where she gives testimony to her absence, to the fact that she will not return home to hug her daughter, like so many others: "De pronto ya no existe el dolor, aquel olor ha desaparecido y ya no le atormenta la muerte. Sara no regresó a casa… Ellas tampoco… Luisa, Marisol, Martha, Rosario, Jacinta, Claudia, Lucía, Elena…" (Rosas Pineda 2014: 61). Pineda's naming of victims points to the power of naming and recognizing victims and each of their violently silenced experiences.

These microcuentos from *¡Basta!* create fantasmata of gender violence that resist the mediatic and popular discourse that surrounds gender violence and feminicide. Their genre, micro-short stories, allows for flashes of experiences and snapshots of gender violence that resist dominant victim diminishing discourse and circumvents the syntax of blame and guilt that makes these violences invisible. These microcuentos reveal spectral moments that create alternative mental images and cultural scripts. As Gordon reminds us, "[k]nowledge is a medium of resistance" (Gordon 2008: 80); these narratives break silences to reveal a myriad of stories of gender violence. They step away from the image of the victim as other or unworthy and construct fantasmata that work towards profound recognition of her in all of "her complex personhood" (Gordon 2008: 5).

[51] This microstory is based on an actual event. Marisela Escobedo Ortiz became an activist after her daughter, Rubí Marisol Frayre Escobedo, was murdered in 2008. In 2010, Escobedo Ortiz was murdered in front of the Palacio de Gobierno in Chihuahua as she protested the release of her daughter's confessed killer due to lack of evidence.

Conclusion: Ghost Libraries of Gender Violence

The hashtag movements, microcuentos, and micro-short stories that I have discussed in this article are traces of silenced and discounted experiences that reveal moments of spectrality. In her 'A Short History of Silence', Rebecca Solnit argues that gender violence and silence are inextricably linked.[52] Solnit establishes how violence against women is followed by imposed silence – often because those who have experienced the violence are taught that their best chance of survival is staying silent. Solnit argues that "[w]omen are instructed, by the way victims are treated and by the widespread tolerance of an epidemic of violence, that their value is low, that speaking up may result in more punishment, that silence may be a better survival strategy" (Solnit 2017). In Mexico, women have repeatedly and implicitly been conditioned to believe that silence is the only means of survival. When the Juárez feminicides first began to come to light in 1993, judicial authorities were intolerably slow to admit that they were occurring and even slower to begin to work against the impunity that still reigns in Mexico in terms of prosecuting perpetrators of all types of gender violence. Estafanía Vela documents the primary reasons why women's experiences with gender violence are diminished and discounted in her contribution to *Violencia invisible*, titled 'La violencia diaria en la que nadie cree'. She observes that victims (and activists) are accused of inventing the violence perpetrated against them, of misinterpreting or exaggerating it, of behaving in ways which made them "deserve" it, or of being short sighted by focusing on violence against women because of the more widespread state and narco-violence that primarily impacts men.[53]

Solnit argues that violence against women "is often against our voices and our stories. It is a refusal of our voices and of what a voice means: the right to self-determination, to participation, to consent or dissent, to live and participate, to interpret and narrate" (Solnit 2017). Some of the most horrific examples of this in the Mexican context have been seen in the murder of anti-feminicide activists such as Susana Chávez and Marisela Escobedo Ortiz. Another example is the failure to follow the laws and legal guidelines to prevent feminicide and gender violence, as Pecova argues in 'Paper Rights'.[54] Solnit reminds us of how many voices are silenced, excluded, ignored:

> The earth is seven-tenths water, but the ratio of silence to voice is far greater. If libraries hold all the stories that have been told, there are ghost libraries of all the stories that have not. The ghosts outnumber the books by some unimaginably vast sum. Even those who have been audible have often earned the privilege through strategic silences or the inability to hear certain voices, including their own (Solnit 2017).

[52] See Solnit (2017).
[53] See Vela (2016).
[54] See Pecova (2016).

The hashtags and microcuentos that I have examined in this article are part of the ghostly libraries of the stories of gender violence in Mexico.

Solnit asserts that "[s]ilencing, or refusing to hear, breaks this social contract of recognizing another's humanity and our connectedness" (Solnit 2017). The narrative acts I discuss here, from Twitter hashtags to anthologies, are inviting others to renew their social contract and work to shift cultural scripts of gender violence. These spectral moments demand justice into the future. In Solnit's words: "when words break through unspeakability, what was tolerated by a society becomes intolerable" (Solnit 2017). To conclude, I ask, what can be done in a world where silence is demanded around gender violence and standards for "alertas de género" are not followed because government officials are worried about losing income from tourism as happened in Puebla state before Mara Castilla's death in fall 2017? Or when police authorities fail to follow laws that prioritize cases of feminicide and kidnapping of women? This is a fight on many fronts and, while legal discourse in Mexico has been described as practically meaningless because the laws are ignored,[55] the collective narrative acts I discuss here work to break the silence and reveal the ghosts of gender violence. They are part of telling stories as a means of active resistance and of catalyzing the change of cultural scripts that violently impose shame and silence around these topics. They are taking part in the recounting of the ghost stories – in Solnit's sense – the stories that have been silenced, discounted, and left untold. They are stories that demand recognition of spectral moment, perhaps even a "transformative recognition" as Gordon describes (Gordon 2008: 8). These collective acts of recounting of #MiPrimerAcoso and #SiMeMatan and of even men participating in these movements might possibly begin the slow task of rewriting the cultural scripts of gender violence and asking the question that *Nexos* posed: "¿Estamos listos para escuchar a las mujeres?" (Redacción Nexos 2016). [56]

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[55] See Pecova (2016).

[56] This article was accepted for publication in fall 2018 before the hashtag #MeTooMx and its variations (such as #MeTooEscritoresMexicanos) exploded in March 2019. These hashtags emphasize less the spectral moments created by the narrative acts like #MiPrimerAcoso and #SiMeMatan but they participate clearly in the collective dialogue that is rewriting the cultural scripts of a wide spectrum of gender violences in Mexico today.

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